

Foreign affairs, environment, defence among big changes as Trudeau brings in new faces; Foreign affairs, environment, defence among big changes as Trudeau brings in new faces

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Body

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared emphatically he will lead the Liberal party into the next election hours after unveiling a cabinet for his third mandate that signalled a refresh with changes at defence and environment, yet stability in key roles for a minority government.

Asked by a reporter to state clearly his future leadership intentions, Trudeau stated flatly "yes," he's sticking around for the long haul, after barely gaining new electoral ground in last month's federal vote.

As he staked out his own political future, Trudeau put several women including two with leadership ambitions in key jobs: Chrystia Freeland in finance and the deputy prime minister's office and Oakville MP Anita Anand at national defence.

Both are seen as potential successors to Trudeau and have earned his trust. Other high-profile roles were given to Mélanie Joly who moves to foreign affairs and Mona Fortier to Treasury Board.

Trudeau promoted several trusted cabinet members or added to their responsibilities.

He picked environmental activist Steven Guilbeault to head his government's ambitious climate action plan, and Marc Miller to lead reconciliation at Crown-Indigenous Relations, while he booted three ministers including Marc Garneau, the foreign affairs minister, out of cabinet altogether.

And Trudeau gave prominent positions to 14 ministers from the Greater Toronto Area, the largest regional block in cabinet.

Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole slammed the new cabinet, saying Trudeau "appointed a group of largely inexperienced and ideologically driven individuals who represent a real risk to our economic prosperity and our national unity."

In a late day news conference, Trudeau said designing a cabinet to bring in new faces and represent the country's diversity "requires difficult choices" but he presented the current ministry as a "refreshed and reinvigorated team," ready to implement big Liberal campaign promises on climate action, child care, housing, and economic recovery post-COVID-19.

Garneau's departure from foreign affairs surprised many and although he is expected to be offered an ambassadorial job, a senior source said the Montreal MP is "disappointed" with Trudeau's decision. .

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The moves came in a shuffle that expanded cabinet by two posts to 38 ministers, kept gender parity and promoted several backbenchers as the prime minister shifted veterans into new roles.

Gov. Gen. Mary May Simon oversaw her first swearing-in of the prime minister's latest cabinet on a rainy Tuesday morning at Rideau Hall, more than a month after Canadians elected another minority Parliament.

To signal the fresh start on problematic files, star performers like Anand, who as a rookie procurement minister competed globally to secure vaccines for Canada, were rewarded with new responsibilities.

At National Defence, Anand will have to ensure the military grapples with the crisis of sexual harassment in a way the outgoing Harjit Sajjan did not. Anand said there is "no one magic solution for this issue. There is no one switch that we can turn on to change everything overnight. This is going to take time."

Sajjan remains in cabinet as minister for international development and gets a new stand-alone agency, the Pacific economic development agency.

Joly, who co-chaired the Liberals' Quebec campaign and had an early career stumble at Heritage, was seen due for a promotion after handling regional economic development files during the pandemic. Joly said her approach to foreign affairs will be one of "humility and audacity."

She wouldn't address how she'll approach the relationship with China.

Pablo Rodriguez, Trudeau's trusted Quebec political lieutenant and House leader, was named a full minister, and takes over Heritage - the department responsible for cultural industries, including regulation of web giants.

Veteran Carolyn Bennett leaves Crown-Indigenous Relations and goes to head up a ministry of mental health and addictions. She'll also be associate minister of health. Marc Miller, who handled Indigenous Services and helped negotiate with Mohawk demonstrators during rail blockades last year, will step into Bennett's role to lead the shift to improving Canada's relations with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Newcomers to cabinet who logged time on the backbenches include former broadcaster Marci Ien, elected in a 2020 byelection in Toronto Centre, who becomes minister for women and gender equality, and youth.

Nova Scotia's Sean Fraser, a hard-working parliamentary secretary for finance whose elevation from the backbenches was overdue, also enters cabinet and gets a big job at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship at a time when Canada is committed to take in 40,000 Afghan refugees.

Markham-Stouffville MP Dr. Helena Jaczek, a former medical officer of health and former Ontario minister of health and long-term care as well as community and social services, becomes responsible for the federal economic development agency for southern Ontario.

However it is the Guilbeault shift to stickhandle Canada's plan to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 that is likely to be the most controversial move of the day. Guilbeault told reporters that it's clear Canadians "want us to go faster ... so we will be continuing and accelerating in the fight against climate change."

His predecessor at environment, Jonathan Wilkinson, a clean energy advocate, has earned big-time cred with the oil and gas sector for working with corporations to advance the goal of cutting emissions, while transitioning to a cleaner energy future.

He moves to natural resources, where he retains a lot of leverage to work on climate change with regulatory powers over the energy sector. "

A senior government official said removing veterans from cabinet does not signal poor performance, but is intended to allow for "fresh thinking around the cabinet table" and to increase representation from areas like the GTA and Alberta where the Liberals won back some electoral ground last month.

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Garneau was not the only veteran pushed out or moved into another portfolio.

Bardish Chagger, the youth and diversity minister who stumbled in the WE Charity affair after she was demoted from House leader, is out.

Jim Carr, who returned to cabinet last year in a reduced role as western adviser after a cancer diagnosis, is now out.

Former Toronto police chief Bill Blair is out of public safety to be replaced by Marco Mendicino.

Blair becomes minister of emergency preparedness, which hives off a portion of his old portfolio into a distinct ministry. But he is out of a job that he enjoyed, in part because he was seen to have either not been aggressive enough or not communicating effectively enough the government's firearms reforms.

François-Philippe Champagne remains in his job at Innovation, Science and Industry, but it is restyled as Innovation, Science and Commerce.

Employment Minister Carla Qualtrough, who crafted many of the individual income supports through the pandemic, remains at employment, workforce development and disability inclusion.

Trusted Trudeau confidante Dominic LeBlanc keeps intergovernmental affairs but also gets the Infrastructure department - a big-spending ministry.

The cabinet changes - Trudeau's 16th since he was first elected six years ago - were intended to show that the Liberals are focused on core priorities coming out of the election campaign.

Senior government officials say Trudeau took lessons from the pandemic in handing a specific Housing portfolio to Ahmed Hussen, who nailed down eight child-care deals with provinces and territories over the summer before the election.

The task of completing those deals now falls to Burlington MP Karina Gould, the former international development minister.

She must negotiate with Alberta, Ontario and New Brunswick to create a "pan-Canadian" \$10-a-day daycare program within the next five years.

With files from Alex Ballingall, Ottawa bureau

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